

Message Text

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67

ACTION NEA-16

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CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 DRC-01 /105 W

----- 065580

R 061435Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5399

INFO AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USINT ALGIERS

USINT DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 2725

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR GARBLED PORTION NUMBRED PARA 1

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, US

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S SUDDEN TRIP TO GENEVA

1. ON SATURDAY, MAY 4, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA LEFT HURRIEDLY FOR WHAT WAS SCHEDULED TO BE A THREE-DAY VISIT TO GENEVA. OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE OF VISIT IS EMERGENCY DENTAL TREATMENT. HOWEVER, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION AS TO WHETHER THERE MAY NOT BE MORE TO VISIT THAN THIS.

2. ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR SPECULATES THAT BOURGUIBA IS FRUSTRATED BY INABILITY TO PLAY IMPORTANT POLITICAL ROLE ON ARAB INTERNATIONAL SCENE. HIS TRIP TO GENEVA IS THUS SEEN IN POLITICAL CONTEXT, AS IS FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI'S CURRENT QUICK TRIP TO DAMASCUS. CHATTI WAS SUPPOSED
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TO HAVE GONE TO MOROCCO, BUT AT LAST MINUTE PLANS

WERE CHANGED TO PERMIT HIM TO VISIT ASSAD -- IN MIDST
OF SECRETARY'S DISENGAGEMENT EFFORT.

3. FRENCH AMBASSADOR SHARES VIEW THAT BOURGUIBA YEARNS
FOR OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY LARGER ROLE ON MIDDLE EAST
STAGE AND THAT CHATTI'S TRIP TO DAMASCUS REPRESENTS
BOURGUIBA'S EFFORT TO PLUG HIMSELF IN. FRENCH AMBASSADOR
ALSO INTERPRETS THESE TWO SUDDEN DEVELOPMENTS -- BOURGUIBA'S
QUICK TRIP TO GENEVA AND CHATTI'S UNANTICIPATED VISIT TO
DAMASCUS AS EXAMPLES OF SPUR OF THE MOMENT TUNISIAN DIPLOMACY
RESULTING FROM BOURGUIBA'S WEAKENED MENTAL CONDITION.

4. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD RUMOR THAT BOURGUIBA JR., WHO HAS
BEEN OUT OF COUNTRY FOR MUCH OF LAST SEVERAL WEEKS, HAS
FALLEN ILL IN GENEVA AND THAT HIS FATHER HAS GONE TO
SEE HIM. AS DEPARTMENT KNOWS, BOURGUIBA, JR.
SUFFERED NERVOUS BREAKDOWN THREE YEAR AGO, FOLLOWED
BY STROKE TWO YEARS AGO, BUT HAS BEEN RECUPERATING
REASONABLY WELL SINCE.

5. COMMENT: PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S CONCERN AT HIS
DIMINISHING CHARISMA ON THE ARAB SCENE IS NO DOUBT
ACCENTUATED BY REPORTS CIRCULATING THAT PRESIDENT NIXON
WILL SOON VISIT THE NEAR EAST, STOPPING OFF AT ALGIERS
AND CAIRO WHILE BYPASSING TUNIS. BOURGUIBA IS OBVIOUSLY
JEALOUS OF BOUMEDIENE'S ACTIVE ROLE IN NON-ALIGNED
WORLD AND GREATER IMPACT BOUMEDIENE CAN
HAVE ON MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT EQUATION. (PRESUMABLY
BOUMEDIENE HAS SOME INFLUENCE, FOR EXAMPLE, WITH SYRIA AND
IRAQ). AS ARAB LEADER WHO HAS FOR MANY YEARS ADVOCATED
SENSIBLE COMPROMISE SOLUTION TO ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE --
AND WAS PILLORIED BY OTHER ARAB STATES FOR HIS ALLEGED
"PRO-ISRAELI STANCE" -- BOURGUIBA FEELS THAT HE HAS BEEN
UNJUSTIFIABLY LEFT OUT OF THE ACTION. WHILE WE CAN
APPRECIATE PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S FEELINGS ON THIS
SCORE, WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE FACT THAT HIS CLOUT
IN ARAB CIRCLES IS AT THIS POINT INAPPRECIABLE AND
THAT, AS ONE OF THE GREAT ARAB STATEMEN OF HIS
TIME, HIS TIME IS PASSING.

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